

DIGITAL ARCHIVES: DEMOCRATIZING THE DOING OF HISTORY

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Conducting historical research with primary sources has been traditionally reserved for scholars who had the means to physically visit historical sites, libraries, and archives. The scholars were typically university faculty and graduate students who had resources to travel to museums or libraries with collections of primary sources. K-12 teachers and students were often excluded from conducting authentic historical research with primary sources outside of their local communities because they lacked the time and money to visit remote sites that housed such primary documents. K-12 teachers and students who sought opportunities to go beyond the tertiary source of their textbook or library resources were often disheartened with the limitations on doing historical research in the classroom.

The creation of digital archives has shifted the dynamics of doing historical research by changing who is able to conduct the research and how historical research is done. Digital archives are collections of numerical data, texts, images, maps, videos, and audio files that are available through the Internet. Universities, libraries, and historical sites often house digital archives. The majority of digital archives are free and accessible to all Internet users. Beyond offering access to resources that were unattainable by many before, digital archives offer users the opportunity to interact with resources in a non-linear fashion. Digital archives are hypertext, and thus are non-linear, which means they can "create capacious spaces in which users make connections and discoveries for themselves. Such archives take advantage of the mass, multiplicity, speed, reiteration, reflexivity, and precision offered by computers."¹

Digital archives have democratized historical research. William Thomas describes how he and his colleagues have attempted to do this with their online historical collections at the Virginia Center for Digital History (VCDH) by giving everyone access to historical documents. He states, "For too long history's methods have been absent without leave from our classrooms. It's time, we feel, to restore the methodology of history to the center of the classroom experience. The web allows us to

accomplish that by providing access to materials that only researchers, scholars, and librarians had access to previously...we at VCDH are trying to democratize history with our projects."² Digital archives, such as VCDH, provide open and convenient access to doing historical research. Individuals who have access to an Internet-connected computer now have free and ready access to millions of digitized primary sources.

Thomas further elaborates on the concept of democratizing history and states that it is about more than just access. Rather, it involves the inclusion of *all* histories. Thomas states, "Most of projects are broadly social in their historical objectives, including as many as possible in the investigation of the subject. So, the Civil War, for example, happened not just to soldiers and generals but to women and men, blacks and whites, poor and rich, children and adults. We want to capture the experience of as many as possible in our work."³

Digital archives hold the potential of having an enormous impact on the teaching and learning of social studies in our schools. The impact is much more complex than teachers and students simply having greater access to primary sources. Because learning through historical inquiry with primary sources is a radical shift from how social studies content is typically taught, teaching and learning with digital archives holds the potential of transforming the nature of social studies education.

While historians and librarians work to create digital archives, teacher educators across the country are attempting to answer the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education's call for technology to become an integral part of preservice and inservice teacher education.⁴ Specifically, social studies teacher educators are seeking appropriate ways to integrate technology to best enhance social studies teaching and learning. Digital archives are one model of how technology can be used in the social studies classroom to teach and to learn in a way that was virtually impossible before the advent of the Internet. This qualitative case study of teachers' experiences with digital archives helps us better understand how teachers use digital archives and how digital archives can be used to democratize historical research. The research questions that framed this study are:

1. What are teachers' experiences with preparing an inquiry-based digital archives research paper?
2. What are teachers' perceptions on how digital archives can impact social studies teaching and learning?

Teaching and Learning History

The transmission model dominates the traditional assumption of teaching and learning history. That is, teachers are expected to have

strong content knowledge and to impart this knowledge to their students. Current curriculum standards and assessment tools support this model of instruction. Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn describe the traditional history classroom as one in which students, "listen to the teacher explain the day's lesson, use the textbook, and take tests. Occasionally they watch a movie. Sometimes they memorize information or read stories about events and people. They seldom work with other students, use original documents, write term papers, or discuss the significance of what they are studying."⁵

An opposing notion of teaching and learning history has recently emerged and is debunking the traditional model. The emerging model of teaching and learning history is grounded in constructivism and engages students in the active process of historical research or "doing history." Linda Levstik and Keith Barton call upon students to engage in inquiry-based lessons, in which they grapple with authentic historical questions.

Students have to learn what it is to ask and answer historical questions—how to find information, how to evaluate sources, how to reconcile conflicting accounts, how to create an interpretive account. And students certainly must learn what the authentic application of historical knowledge looks like. They must see how history can explain the present and they must see this in the most authentic of ways—through the comparison of conflicting ideas about the nature and significance of the past.⁶

Teachers must possess pedagogical content knowledge to lead students through the steps of historical inquiry.⁷ Pedagogical content knowledge is the "blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized."⁸ It is imperative that teachers possess an in-depth understanding of the content and pedagogy related to teaching and learning social studies. "Before a teacher can develop powerful pedagogical tools, he or she must be familiar with the process of inquiry and the terms of discourse in the discipline."⁹ When social studies teachers possess pedagogical content knowledge, they are able to guide their students through an active learning process grounded in constructivism.

Constructivism is a theory of knowing that purports all new knowledge is constructed based on the learner's previous experiences and knowledge.¹⁰ It is the interaction between one's current knowledge and new ideas or situations.¹¹ Learners develop meaningful contexts, create personal interpretations, and then construct their own knowledge. Thus, strategies that permit students to interact with new knowledge in a personal way should be key elements of teaching and learning social studies. There are various perspectives of constructivism in the classroom. Thomas Duffy and Donald Cunningham state that the basic underlying framework of constructivism is based upon "(1) learning [as] an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and (2) instruc-

tion [as] a process of supporting that construction rather than communicating knowledge."¹² Digital archives offer social studies teachers a grand opportunity to enrich their pedagogical content knowledge and engage their students in active learning.

Digital Archives

The hypertext nature of digital archives offers learners flexibility in what information they access and how they access the information. Digital archives are collections of primary sources, such as letters, diaries, journals, maps, photographs, and interviews that have been digitized and placed online. The majority of digital archives are developed and maintained by libraries and museums. Each digitized item is cataloged and arranged in a vast online catalog system. Items may be located by browsing or searching.

Items within digital archives are hypertext documents, in that text is "composed of blocks or words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains, or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms, link, node, network path."¹³ Hypertext documents allow the reader to choose the path in which to read a document. They offer the reader freedom to physically move through the document and across documents.

A hypertext document system allows authors or groups of authors to link information together, create paths through a corpus of related materials, annotate existing texts, and create notes that point readers to either bibliographic data or the body of referenced text.... Readers can browse through linked, cross-referenced, annotated texts in an orderly but nonsequential manner.¹⁴

Because of the unique nature of hypertext, readers must take on a much more active role in the reading process. Readers are no longer limited to reading sequentially, page by page. Rather, they now make their own decisions about what to read and how to read it.

The Virginia Center for Digital History argues that digital history resources hold the ability to "transform how history is taught, learned, understood, and accessed."¹⁵ Indeed, the hypertext history paper goes well beyond footnotes or hypertext links to resources that enhance the paper.

A major goal of mature hypertextual history will be to embody complexity as well as to describe it. The historian who writes such texts will obviously have to think along several axes, offering coherent narratives and coherent analyses on several levels before creating elaborate links and the text that accompanied them. Such work will be challenging, to say the least, and it will not offer precisely the same pleasures we find in the stories and analyses of current book technology. But it could offer pleasures of its own, pleasures of sophisticated and comprehensive understanding, even of aesthetic intricacy. Hypertextual history need not introduce purposeful obfuscation and disorientation, goals often championed by some early theorists and practitioners of literary hyper-

text. Hypertext, in fact, could represent a new kind of rationality and empiricism.¹⁶

Digital archives offer readers the choice to decide what to read and how to read it. This in itself is revolutionary considering the linear aspect of traditional school books. Hypertext historical accounts call upon readers to construct or make sense of the past by linking accounts in a way that is meaningful to them, much as Linda Levstik and Keith Barton¹⁷ refer to as they cite the importance of students "doing history." This study will seek to understand how teachers interact with digital archives by examining their experiences using digital archives to prepare a hypertext paper.

Methodology

Participants and Course Context

The participants in this study were seventeen middle and secondary social studies teachers. At the time of the study, the teachers were members of a social studies cohort of students enrolled in a part-time M.Ed. program at a large southeastern university. The M.Ed. program is a two-and-a-half-year program that allows teachers to obtain their masters while continuing to teach. The teachers were in their first semester of the program at the time of this study. The program is cohort-based, meaning that these seventeen teachers take all of their courses together. Eight of the teachers were female and nine were male. One teacher was African American and sixteen of the teachers were Caucasian. All of the teachers had at least three years of teaching experience. The teachers were employed by four different school systems.

The course the teachers were taking at the time of this study was a hybrid course. That is, half of the course work was online and half of the course work was face-to-face. This course was the teachers' first one in the program and it was the only course they were taking that semester. The course objectives, as stated on the syllabus, were for students: to examine and critique a variety of digital history resources, to use digital history resources to follow a historical line of inquiry, and to develop instructional materials to accompany an assigned digital archive. The digital history inquiry project was purposefully selected for this study because it was the first digital history project the teachers completed [it is anticipated that they will create additional projects during their graduate school experience] and because there are supporting documents that could be used to triangulate the data: online discussion and narrative reflections.

The students completed the digital history inquiry project after spending four weeks examining and critiquing digital history Web sites

and related literature. According to the syllabus, the purpose of the digital history inquiry project was for the teachers to investigate a historical inquiry question of their choice. Teachers were required to cite at least ten digital primary sources in their paper. The final paper was presented in hypertext format, meaning that the teachers were required to create a Web page for their text and insert hyperlinks to the variety of primary sources they referenced.

Data Collection

Three primary sources of data were collected to inform this study: digital history inquiry projects, reflective narratives, and online discussion postings. Each teacher was required to prepare a hypertext research paper. The research paper reported the teachers' findings and had links to the online primary sources they used in their research. Upon completion of the hypertext research paper, each teacher prepared a reflective narrative. The reflective narrative provided the teacher with the opportunity to reflect on the research process and to share their experiences in a personal genre. Online discussions were one of the course requirements and were ongoing throughout the semester. The online discussions were a threaded, Web-based discussion format that typically responded to an instructor generated prompt.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data collected from the various sources. Two researchers worked in tandem to analyze the data. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin referred to this method as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed."¹⁸ Barney Glaser's six steps for analyzing the data in the constant comparative method guided the data analysis. As the research evolved, a running list of emerging themes was maintained; new patterns were added to the list and revisions made.¹⁹ The two researchers conducted member checks throughout the data analysis in order to verify the validity of the study. With the completion of data collection, the list of patterns was clustered, yielding three assertions.

Validity

Validity of this research is accounted for in multiple forms. From the beginning of the research process the conceptual framework grounded the methodology, including the research design, data collection, and data analysis. Triangulation was achieved by gathering multiple data from each participant and by performing a member check on the data analysis.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of the data revealed three assertions related to the democratization of doing history. Each assertion explores one aspect of how digital archives can be used to democratize the doing of history. The following section will explore the three themes that emerged and discuss the limitations of the study. Quotations from the teachers' online discussions, narratives, and research projects will be used to provide evidence for each assertion. The table below outlines the three assertions.

Table One—Assertions

Assertion 1	Digital history archives enable teachers to engage in historical inquiry in a way that was not possible in the past.
Assertion 2	Digital history archives gave teachers access to historical accounts they had previously not been able to access easily.
Assertion 3	The unique nature of hypertext can shift the social studies classroom from teacher-centered and text-book-centered to student-centered and knowledge-centered.

Table One Assertions

Assertion 1: Digital history archives enable teachers to engage in historical inquiry in a way they had not been able to in the past. The teachers were required to identify digital primary sources to help answer their research question and present their findings in a hypertext document. The teachers had to search for appropriate digital archives, interpret the documents they found, and organize their findings in the final hypertext paper. Conducting historical research in this manner enabled teachers to engage in historical inquiry in a way they had not done in the past. Because digital archives provide Internet users access to primary sources that traditionally were accessible only in a physical library or archive, they invite non-traditional researchers to engage in the research process. The teachers reported that digital archives gave them an entrée to resources to which they did not have access in the past and that the materials were convenient and conducive to their needs.

The teachers were energized and motivated by conducting their own historical research. Thirteen of the seventeen teachers stated it was the first time they had engaged in historical research since their undergraduate history experiences. Four teachers stated it was the first time they

had ever conducted historical research predominantly with primary sources. All of the teachers noted that having access to primary sources online had a significant impact on who could do research and when they did their research. One teacher noted the access allowed him to conduct research in a way impossible before the advent of the World Wide Web.

By finding so many incredible primary source documents on the Internet, I was able to create a paper that never would have been possible when I was in school. I have to laugh when I think about how weak a paper like this would've been if I'd written it ten years ago.... I used to only be able to use what was in the local library. Now, it's like a never-ending library.

The Internet was not widely available when the teachers were undergraduate students. Most were amazed at how digital archives opened up historical research to Internet users. They felt empowered with the convenient access to primary resources. One teacher found the convenient nature of digital archives to be "mind boggling." He explains:

The research was quite different than past history papers because of the lack of library time; I only went to the library once, and I only used one print book. I was able to sit at home any time of day or night and do my research. This means that really anyone can do historical research at any time from any place, as long as they have a computer. It's mind boggling what this means.

The teachers involved in this study were energized and motivated to conduct research with digital archives. They found access to the primary sources to be convenient for their schedules, and they hypothesized this convenience would translate into easy access for the students. It was a meaningful experience for the teachers and provided them the opportunity to engage in inquiry activities that were atypical for them.

Assertion 2: Digital history archives gave teachers access to historical accounts they had not previously been able to access easily. Beyond access and convenience, the teachers reported that digital archives provided a venue to hear the stories of those often marginalized by traditional history textbooks. The teachers found that by "doing history" with digital archives, they not only had convenient access to primary sources, but that they had access to accounts that are often omitted from conventional textbooks and school libraries. Thirteen of the seventeen teachers remarked that they selected their topic because it was a topic they taught in their classrooms, but they wanted to know more about those who aren't equally represented in the textbook histories. They also wanted to better understand the lives and situations behind historical situations.

For example, one student chose to research the Pullman Porters' role during the Jim Crow era. The teacher stated that he had background information on the Pullman Porters, but that he knew very little about the men who were the Porters. He wanted to better understand why the Porters were often controversial and suffered from negative stereotypes.

His research led him to listening to songs about the Porters, reading first-hand accounts from the Porters, and reading newspaper articles about the Porters.

This teacher commented that he was “exhilarated” by the research process. He reflected on his project by stating, “I now see the Porters in a different light; I see them as they were: very learned men who really were survivors. They took pride in their work and they shouldn’t be belittled (in their era or today) for their actions.” In this situation, the teacher went beyond the brief summary of the Pullman Porters that is included in most history surveys, and he listened to the individual voices of the Porters. He now viewed them not simply as a group of activists, but as individuals with personal lives and motivations.

Another teacher did his project on the G.I. Bill. He commented in his narrative, “The G.I. Bill was a topic I mentioned with my history classes in the past, but until I completed my project I really never fully understood the impact that it had on our middle-class values.” He went on to describe how meaningful the research exercise was for him to not only better understand the impact of the G.I. Bill on the middle class, but also to understand his family’s own experience with the G.I. Bill.

Two other teachers framed their projects around women’s experiences. One researched the role of women on the homefront during the Civil War. Another teacher explored the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. She teaches the event each year, and she wanted to explore the topic further to uncover the stories behind the women who had been victims of the tragic event. Through cross-referencing the victims’ names with the online Ellis Island database, she identified a mother and her two daughters who had immigrated to the United States four years before the fire. All three were victims of the fire.

She researched the mother and her two daughters and learned about their personal lives and how their family dealt with the tragedy. She eventually connected them to a former New York state senator who had given a keynote speech at the 50th memorial service in 1961. She contacted the senator, and with his help, was able to further research the family. The teacher commented that now when she teaches the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, she uses the textbook to frame the event, but then she uses the documents she found to put “real lives on the framework” of this tragedy.

Digital archives helped teachers locate and listen to the voices of those often marginalized by conventional historical accounts. The teachers were eager to seek out personal accounts behind the events that they teach to their own students. They found it meaningful and informative to engage in this process and maintained that they will share the accounts they uncovered with their own students.

Assertion 3: The unique nature of hypertext can shift the social studies classroom from teacher-centered and textbook-centered to student-centered and knowledge-centered. In addition to convenient access and access to personal accounts, the teachers reported in their online discussions that digital archives had the potential to shift the nature of teaching and learning social studies from being teacher-centered and textbook-centered to student-centered and knowledge-centered. The shift was two-fold in that it encompassed both the nature of hypertext and the nature of inquiry-based lessons.

The teachers completed readings and assignments for the first half of the course that focused on hypertext theory. The teachers found reading hypertext documents to be not only more time consuming than the traditional paper, but also more of an intellectual challenge. It was challenging for them to read in a non-linear fashion because they were used to being told what to read and how much. Presented with hypertext documents, the teachers now had a choice over what to read and how much to read. Hypertext democratizes the reading process in that the reader determines what and how to read a document.

By following different links, the teachers were given the opportunity to explore their own interests and make their own decisions about what to read and how to read it. One teacher expressed frustration, yet still enjoyed the freedom from having the choice to make decisions with each reading assignment.

This [reading hypertext documents] was really hard for me at the beginning. I like to do what I'm supposed to do. I like to read from start to finish and learn what I am supposed to. Reading these hypertext documents and reading the hypertext primary sources blew me away. I used to just print out articles that were assigned and read them as a hard copy. Now, I have to read on my computer. Because I never know which way I'm going to go. It's all about what I want to know more about it. But, I'm always nervous that I get the right answers. I guess that's just the teacher in me!

Preparing a hypertext paper presented another series of challenges for the teachers. None of the teachers had written a hypertext paper before this course assignment. They struggled with preparing a document in which they could not dictate how the reader might move through it. This notion went against everything the teachers previously had experienced about writing a paper for an audience. Three of the teachers reflected on the writing process:

The writing of the paper was a whole different story. I found that writing online takes significantly more time to copy-edit than simply writing a paper in Word. To achieve a very basic nonlinear structure to the site required several hours above and beyond the research and writing of text. The problem wasn't finding enough resources, it was figuring out which ones to use and how they connected. I often found myself ten web pages away from where I started and didn't know how I got there.

Another teacher commented that this experience was "more like real history." He reflected:

As I went from source to source in the paper, it allowed me to see the various components that made up the historical event.I had the opportunity to break down the material and put it back together again.there was a type of kinesthetic learning that came from moving from one link to another. I really got the meaning of doing history with this type of writing. I think this kind of paper forces the writer to see the connections in history that are often missed in a more typical paper.

The shift from teacher-centered and textbook-centered to student-centered and knowledge-centered also was apparent as the teachers reflected on the inquiry-based aspect of the project. They expressed a sense of uneasiness with the openness of the assignment, yet were motivated by the constructivist nature of the assignment. In reference to the experience as a graduate student, one teacher commented:

This assignment is scary to me in many ways. It's so open-ended. Not at all what I am used to. We came up with our own topic and have to find our own primary sources. I'm having to work harder, I think. I'm having to form more of my own opinions and come up with my own conclusions. There isn't a right or wrong answer for any of this. I'm just having to make sense of resources I find. I guess this is what they mean when they talk about constructing new knowledge?

In summary, the teachers found preparing a hypertext paper to be an inviting challenge. The disequilibrium they experienced was a challenge that most eventually embraced and overcame. The fact that there was not one body of knowledge that they were expected to learn and one way to learn it was atypical for the teachers both as graduate students and teachers. The hypertext inquiry activity provided a more open, constructivist, and democratic learning environment than one that is teacher- and knowledge-centered.

Conclusion

I have attempted to provide a rich description of classroom teachers' experiences with digital history archives. The teachers in this study initially had little knowledge or experience related to digital archives. The course readings and activities provided them with opportunities to develop an understanding of how digital archives can transform teaching and learning social studies. The teachers' experienced first hand how digital archives can democratize the doing of history. They learned about what resources are available through the Internet and they learned how these resources could be used to engage in an inquiry-based project.

Additionally, the teachers explored the notion of hypertext as a reader and as an author. They struggled with the difficulties of writing for an

audience that may not read in a linear fashion. Hypertext also provided them with the freedom to read and explore a topic of their choice in a self-constructed fashion.

When the teachers reflected upon the nature of teaching and learning with digital history resources in their own classroom, they expressed excitement about the democratization of doing history. Yet, they also shared concerns about implementing digital history into the classroom. Their concerns included issues related to having computer access in the classroom and taking the time to go in-depth with a topic while also meeting required curriculum standards. They also expressed concern about the shifts that digital archives may bring to their own classroom. They cited concern over students knowing more about the technology than the teachers knew, and they cited concern over the time it would take to prepare and implement inquiry-based lessons with digital archives. These are valid concerns that must be addressed in future studies.

On the practitioner level, this study presents an innovative way of engaging teachers in digital history inquiry. Rather than just teaching about digital history inquiry, teachers were engaged in the experience as the learner. The teachers' hypertext papers and narratives demonstrate teacher eagerness to engage in historical inquiry, yet anxiousness regarding use of new technologies and the switch from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction.

On the theoretical level, this study begins the examination into teachers' implementation of teaching with digital archives. Digital archives democratize the doing of history and provide social studies educators with an opportunity to engage students in constructivist-based learning in a manner that was practically impossible before the advent of the World Wide Web. The literature to date primarily examines preservice teachers' experiences with digital history archives during their methods class. This study begins the exploration into practicing teachers' implementation of digital archives in the classroom.

Because the teachers in this study are members of a cohort and will take courses together over two-and-a-half years, future studies that follow these teachers throughout their graduate school experience and after their graduation are planned. Future studies will allow researchers to examine teacher beliefs and practices related to digital history archives over time and to collect a variety of data sources, such as interviews, additional course assignments, and classroom observations.

NOTES

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